

# KATIE *of* BIRDLAND



By EDITH KINNEY STELLMANN







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1ST EDITION  
OUT OF PRINT







KATIE *of* BIRDLAND













*A Beautiful  
Lake Where  
I Fed the  
Ducks Pieces  
of Bread*





# Katie of Birdland

An Idyl of the Aviary in Golden  
Gate Park, *By Edith Kinney Stellmann*

*Author of "Exposition Babies"*

Illustrated with  
Special Camera Studies by  
*Louis J. Stellmann*

San Francisco  
H. S. Crocker Company  
Publishers





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San Francisco





## *Dedication*

*Oh, birds: lucky creatures of air!  
Whose wings bear you swiftly on high  
To a place where you scan  
All the doings of Man,  
Do you laugh at him, birds, on the sly—  
When he foolishly shows  
All the little he knows;—  
Or do you look down with a sigh?*

*—Edith Kinney Stellmann*







KATIE *of* BIRDLAND







# KATIE *of* BIRDLAND



An Idyl of  
Golden  
Gate Park

3

Of all the thousands who visit Golden Gate Park, only a very few see the Aviary. They go to the Museum, the Conservatory, the Music Stand, the Tennis Court and the Animals, and most of them do not even know that on one of the tiny hills, almost hidden by trees, within a stone's throw of the many more conspicuous attractions that surround it, is a little world of birds.

There are cages so large that the little winged folk inside of them scarcely realize that they have not the freedom of





Katie of  
Birdland

4

the universe. Nor do they know that the great stretch of three dimension wire walls, which keep them in, are also for the purpose of keeping out cruel enemies of their own kind who would prey upon them, from the belligerent sparrows, which are not much larger than the canaries themselves, to the big hawks which circle far up into the sky.

There are many of these wire houses, because feathered folk don't know much more about brotherly love than Humans and, if they were all put into a single domicile—no matter how large—they would scold and fight and even kill one another over something to eat, a place in the sun, a choice apartment in some particular tree or, perhaps, jealousy about a lady bird.

Altogether they are very much like people in their habits, emotions and acts. One may learn a great deal in the Aviary.

In the first place, it is a lovely spot,





Katie of  
Birdland

5

"Katie"





Katie of  
Birdland

6

especially in the early morning, when the air is crisp and fine and the sunlight splashes through the leaves, dappling the ground with spots of gold; and, in the second place, it is exceedingly interesting, because there are so many feathered inhabitants of the wire houses—hundreds of different kinds and colors and shapes, from the King and Queen of the Aviary, Mr. and Mrs. Bald Eagle, to the tiniest finches, canaries and Japanese Love birds so small that they look like little red and yellow dots of brightness on the golden-green background of the sunlit grass.

Long ago I discovered this country of Birdland and always it seemed to me like an enchanted realm. Many and many a time, I have expected some of the feathered citizens to address me and often I have talked to them and received answers which I could not understand but which I felt certain would be per-



fectly intelligible to anyone who had learned the Bird Talk.

Something of all this I have confided to old Mr. Proud, who is father to the people of the Aviary. All the birds love him, not only because he feeds them, but because they know he is to be trusted and that he wishes them well.

He laughs when I talk of such things, my old friend, but in his heart I think he believes them himself, and not long ago he made an admission which led to the wonderful adventure that is responsible for this book.

There was something mystic and unusual in the air that morning, at least it seemed so to me. Mr. Proud stood with a brilliant little paroquet on each hand. They were chattering away to him and one of them was trying to explain which of his companions had taken a bite out of his neck during a family discussion on the evening before. The old man



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

8

*Old Mr.  
Proud and  
the Paroquets*





looked very sympathetic and applied some healing remedies to the wound.

"Mebbe you're right," he said, "These little fellows could be taught to say words just like parrots and mebbe they think, too, like ourselves. There's one of those pheasants over there—little Katie—that's the smartest bird in the whole Aviary. If *she* could talk, she could tell you about everything."

He picked up a pail of feed and ambled off in the direction of the pheasant house.

"Come along with me," he called over his shoulder, "and I'll introduce you to Katie. Mebbe she'll give you an interview when she finds out you're one of those writer-folks."

Into the round house belonging to the pheasants I followed Mr. Proud. He waved his hand.

"This is Katie, Ma'am," he said, with a sly wink. "Now, Katie, you be a good girl and give this lady an interview."



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

10

It was easy to see why my old friend thought so much of Katie. She was wonderfully dainty and graceful—not a bit afraid—and she had the knowingest expression in her bright, dancing eyes I have ever seen.

“Yes, indeed,” I said, “she’s a smart little lady. To what family does she belong?”

There was no answer for a moment. My old friend had gone on with his pail and left me behind. Then the quaintest, softest, most musical, little voice you could possibly imagine said, near my feet:

“I am a Lady Amsherst.”

I gasped with astonishment. There stood Katie looking up at me, with her head cocked on one side, evidently ready for further conversation. In fact, when I made no response but kept staring down at her with my mouth open, she added, “You may not know it, but you belong to the pheasant family *yourself*.”

There came to my mind something





Katie of  
Birdland

II

Sam Reeves





Katie of  
Birdland

12

that an old Mystic had told me long ago—a quaint bit of Oriental symbolism—to the effect that every Human finds his counterpart in bird or beast. He had even classified me in detail.

“Why, y-e-s,” I stammered. “I am a Golden Pheasant.”

“Quite right,” said Katie in her decided way, “and that makes us first cousins.”

I was pleased, I can tell you, to be taken right into the family that way, so I smiled and cocked my head as neatly as I could.

“Would you like to take a walk about the Aviary?” asked Katie. “I can tell you all about the birds. Come on. We will chat as we go.”

“Nothing would please me better,” I agreed heartily, so we started.

“I hope you won’t mind my saying what I think about the Reeves branch of the family,” said Katie, deprecatingly,



as we passed a handsome but cross-looking pheasant who was scolding his wife and glaring in a very hostile way at one of his neighbors. "I don't like to speak ill of *anybody*, but"—and here she suddenly raised her voice, "some people think they're just *too* smart!"

Mr. Proud had spoken of this very Reeves pheasant a few days before and rubbed a red spot on his nose where the irate bird had pecked at him, in a fit of temper at feeding time, so I felt disposed to agree with Katie and enjoyed the snub she had given her ill-natured cousin. As for the Reeves pheasant, he made some sneering remark about the beauty of minding one's own business and turned his back upon us.

"I suppose," said Katie seriously, "there has to be a black sheep in every family, but I can't for the life of me understand what makes Sam Reeves act that way. He has a good home and his health is



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

14

*The Silver  
Pheasant*





fair, except for a little indigestion which comes from his fits of temper. Some of the young hen pheasants, who think he is very handsome, blame his wife, but I don't. Sally Reeves may have her share of temper, but it would irritate the Dove of Peace herself to live with Sam."

"That's very, very true," agreed a Silver pheasant who stepped up to us just then.

"You will pardon me. I couldn't help overhearing and I just had to say what I thought of that Sam—'Handsome is as handsome does'—that's the way I look at it."

The Silver pheasant looked a little out of form. He had lost a couple of his lovely tail feathers and, as he lives quite near the Reeves bird and is said to be fond of Sally, I formed my own conclusions as to the cause of his appearance and remarks—even though I agreed with the latter.

Katie was quite sympathetic about



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

16

the tail and we left the Silver pheasant somewhat comforted. As we turned away Katie raised her voice again and remarked: "The Silver pheasants are all as charming as they are good looking," which made our late companion strut and preen himself a bit.

"Yes, indeed, I am sure that is true," I answered quickly, raising my voice, also.

Katie gave a soft, little laugh as though she enjoyed the bit of flattery she bestowed. "That makes up for the unkind remark I made," she said, "and it's perfectly true. The Silver pheasants *are* nice birds—and the Golden pheasants are even nicer." She gave me a sidelong glance, full of mischief and I was rather embarrassed, so I made no reply, but did my best to look like a bird.

"Na-a-a-n-a-rrr-um!" I heard in a prolonged croon, like a chant, over my head, followed by a brushing, scraping noise. We looked up and saw a large peacock





Katie of  
Birdland

17

*The Leaf  
Bordered  
Path to  
Birdland*





Katie of  
Birdland

18

alight on the wire netting above. He perked his head vainly and said: "Here I am. Don't I look fine? Well, I should say so!"

Katie was distressed by this show of vanity and looked rather sternly at the gorgeous visitor, but the peacock was conscious of nothing save his own lordly self. He spread his beautiful tail feathers to their utmost capacity and turned slowly as though he feared too sudden a revelation of his splendors might overwhelm us. It was a wonderful display and I caught my breath with admiration, but Katie was not a bit impressed.

"I consider such pride the height of vulgarity," she cried, and the peacock, hearing her, flew off in high dudgeon.

I thought Mr. Peacock had rather too good an opinion of himself for good taste, but I have a failing for the gorgeous bird.



"Perhaps he can't help it," I ventured. "He's very famous, you know. In olden days he was held sacred to the Goddess Juno."

"Well, that didn't keep Quintus Somebody-or-other from serving him at a banquet," said Katie disdainfully. "These prize beauties seldom have any brains."

We dismissed the subject by common consent as we turned into the leaf-bordered path that led to the largest of the bird palaces.

On the way, we passed several smaller houses, where birds of prey, who cannot be trusted with their more peaceable brothers and sisters, dwell in solitary dignity. In one of these, five owls blinked mournfully and yawned prodigiously. It gave me a drowsy feeling just to look at them.

"They're terribly sleepy—and who wouldn't be, if he sat up all night?" laughed Katie. "Some people think they



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

20



*Mr. Bald  
Eagle*



set a very bad example to the young birds, but one must remember that it's their nature—they can't help it, so we shouldn't blame them, should we?"

An old owl heard her. "Humph!" he grunted. "People are always blaming their neighbors without taking the trouble to inquire into the cause of their complaints. That's the way with the world. Folks seldom give others credit for the good they do. They take that for granted and never balance it against the bad. Now we eat a heap of rats and mice and keep the place safe for the young birds, but nobody thinks of that. We're called dissipated and wicked merely because we have a different way of spending our days and nights from others. That's the way with folks—what's unfamiliar to them is always condemned."

"Good for you, Bill!" said another owl. "And I'll tell you something else: Besides being scavengers we're very intellectual."



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

22

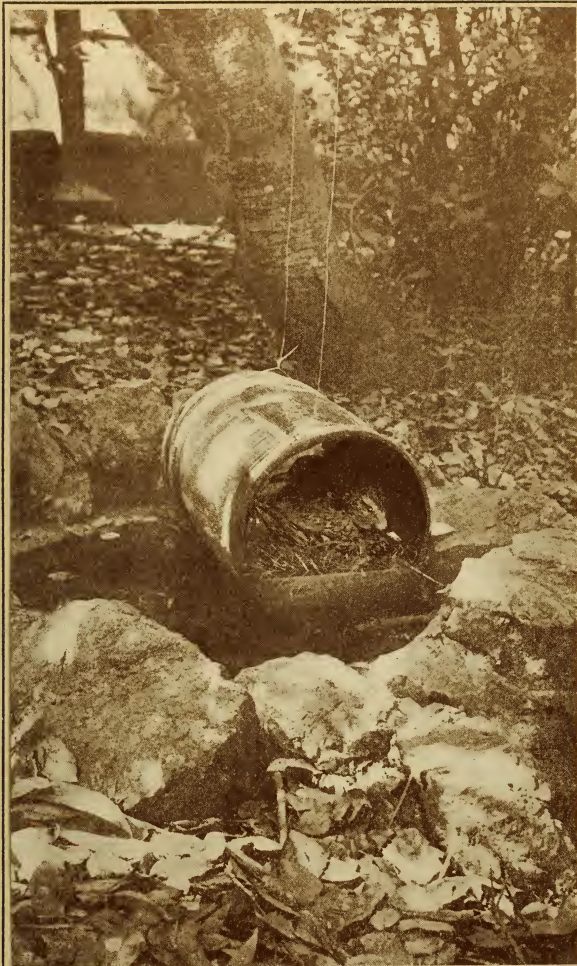
We know more than most birds. It doesn't look like rain, does it? Well, just you watch! The drops are coming down pretty soon. Just you watch!" He gave a long chuckle and then his head sank forward; soon a soft snore showed that he had relapsed into slumber.

We passed on to the next cage, where the great American Bald Eagle, with regal dignity, sat on his high perch. I could almost see a pennant with "E Pluribus Unum" under him. He looked down very sternly, like a monarch—as indeed he truly is—and instinctively I saluted him as I would the American flag, for he seemed just as much representative of the nation.

"I wish you wouldn't glare so," said Katie nervously.

"One must preserve one's dignity," said the eagle mildly, "especially when one is the emblem of the greatest country on earth."





Katie of  
Birdland

23

*The  
Mandarin  
Duck's Nest*





Katie of  
Birdland

24

"Is that really true?" asked Katie, lowering her tone—a bit awed. "I know he is King of the Birds, but I didn't realize that he was so important to Humans as all that."

I nodded vigorously and we tiptoed on, quite impressed by the grand air of the Bird Sovereign.

In one of the biggest of the wire houses, we found a lot of Mandarin ducks. Some of them were splashed with mud and none of them looked the least dignified, which was something of a relief after our visits to the Eagle and Owls. The ducks looked so awkward, comfortable and good natured, that we just loved them. Certain of the ducks make their home in a beautiful lake quite a distance from the Aviary where I had sometimes visited them and fed them pieces of bread, but the rarer and more interesting kinds abide in the great net-covered compound of the Mandarins.



Mr. Proud had fashioned a fine, new nest for the Mandarins by suspending a keg—both ends knocked out of it—over a tiny pond by means of wires fastened to a tree-bough above. They were all very busy and few of them vouchsafed us so much as a glance. One elderly drake, who seemed to be the father of the brood, finally turned to us and said, apologetically, "This is a fine nest, but it will take a lot of fixing. Humans can only go so far. Our own people must always put the finishing touches on anything like this."

"Yes, indeed," confirmed a fat duck, waddling up, "yes, indeed—that's right. Excuse us, won't you? We're very busy. Yes, indeed!"

She pulled out a few of her feathers, which she proudly deposited in the bottom of the keg and then looked rather covetously at Katie's fine coat as though she would have liked a contribution. The



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

26

*Feeding the  
Little Birds*





glance was not lost on my little friend.

"Let us move on," she said hastily.

"Well, good bye, then," piped a quaint little voice which seemed to come almost from beneath our feet, and we saw a wee quail which was standing so still, we should not have noticed her at all if she hadn't spoken. Katie said farewell to the tiny stranger and I learned from my companion that the quail had shocked her family and friends by refusing to leave the Mandarin ducks—though her people lived on the other side of the Aviary.

"Perhaps she wants to study the Orientals," I suggested.

"Maybe," agreed Katie. "but I think the real reason is that the food is more plentiful over here. The ducks are slow and this little quail, who is very quick in her movements, can pick up more grain than among her own kind where the competition is stronger."



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

28

"Why, the mercenary little wretch!" I exclaimed in disappointment. "I thought it was love for the ducks that made her stay here."

"Well, you never can tell," returned Katie, wisely wagging her head, "and these days when the Competitive System is so strong that all the Humans are writing and speechifying about it, you can't blame a little quail for looking after her stomach."

"No," said I, "that is true, but how did you learn about the Competitive System?"

"Oh, we birds learn a great deal of what is going on in the world," replied Katie. "The sparrows and humming birds tell us. They are always trying to persuade the little birds to escape from their cages and come out into the Larger Life, as they call it. But the little birds know better. They don't trust the sparrows, who are the natu-





Katie of  
Birdland

29

*Doves in  
their Leafy  
Bower*







Katie of  
Birdland

30

ral enemies of the tiny feathered people. Come, we will visit some of them."

We entered the largest of the wire-houses and it was our good luck to reach there just as our old friend, Mr. Proud, arrived with a pail full of feed. He called to the birds and they came flying from everywhere to have their morning meal. Katie introduced me to a large number of wee birds, including the Sociable birds, the dear, little Chinese Love birds, some Linnets and Finches, a Java sparrow and a Japanese robin. The Finch family was quite numerous. I can remember only a few of their names, some of which were very appetizing and spicy, such as Mr. Strawberry Finch and Mr. Nutmeg Finch, and there was also a fat, little bird of exceedingly prosperous appearance, whose name was Mr. Gold Finch.

They all talked very rapidly and made such a babel of piping sounds



that I could not understand much of their conversation, but they seemed unusually harmonious for their manner was polite, ever affectionate toward one another, and it was a joy to watch them.

"We mustn't stay too long," Katie finally reminded me, "because they are a bit shy before strangers and can eat more comfortably when they haven't any company," so we walked on and entered another big house across the main aisle of the Aviary.

Here I heard some very fine bird music and when I asked Katie to introduce the singer, she persuaded a sweet, little thrush, who was trying to hide in a tree, to come forward.

Miss Thrush was quite bashful and seemed embarrassed when I told her what a fine voice she had and how much I enjoyed her song. She retired as soon as politeness permitted, with a



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

32

*The  
Melancholy  
Turkey*





shy word of gratitude and pretty soon I heard her warbling and trilling again, from some unseen source.

"I am glad you paid her such a compliment," said Katie to me. "The thrushes are all very modest and a word of praise, now and then, is good for them."

Quite a flock of pigeons flew over our heads and called out greetings to Katie and me. They were so cordial and neighborly that I felt very much at home with them and was thankful that I had never eaten any squab.

Among the branches of a gnarly, old tree, some beautiful, white doves sat, picturesquely billing and cooing. They stopped as we approached and looked at me a bit dubiously until Katie came forward as my sponsor. They welcomed me warmly when Katie told them I believed most thoroughly in Peace. We had quite a discussion of



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

34

this subject. They have formed a Peace Society and are working very hard to stop warfare and strife of all kinds. Some of them were a bit discouraged by the terrible battles in Europe, but most of them were hopeful; they said that, sometime in the future, birds and men too would get together and talk their differences over calmly and sensibly instead of shooting each other by the millions, over disputes which nobody really understood. Some of them favored Preparedness and others were seriously opposed to it, but they didn't fight about the best methods to achieve Peace, which seemed quite encouraging when I stopped to consider the way men go about such things.

After we said goodbye to the doves, we encountered a large, white turkey of melancholy mien, who asked quite solemnly, "Have you seen anything of my Lady?"





Katie of  
Birdland

35

*Mr. Owl, the  
Weather  
Prophet*





Katie of  
Birdland

36

"He means his wife," Katie whispered to me, and shook her head whereupon the turkey gobbled sadly and went on, searching in the most unlikely places and never stopping a minute to rest.

"That's a very sad case," Katie told me. "They were a handsome couple—he and his wife. She was a bit wild, some said, but anyone could see they were in love with each other. Well, one day she disappeared. Of course there was all sorts of gossip and scandal but nobody really knows where she went and he still believes that some day she will turn up, though everyone else has given up hope. I think grief has affected his mind, poor dear!" Katie again shook her head mournfully.

I met a crested Mocking bird from Japan, who appeared quite a gentleman and said he hoped our respective nations would always be on good terms in spite of the "jingoes" as he called



them. I agreed with him heartily. We stopped to listen to an English Black-bird, who was making what sounded like a long, dry talk on Peace and War and the causes back of them.

"That fellow's something of a bore," said Katie. "They tell me he is terribly hen-pecked and scarcely gets a chance to open his mouth at home, and so I suppose the poor fellow improves his opportunity whenever he can get anybody to listen to him. The skylarks are always teasing him. There they are now, just listen to them!"

Very gay and a bit dissipated looking were the skylarks, as they flew over the head of the orator, calling out to him and his audience: "Oh, come on and have a good time. Don't be so serious. It never does any good. Forget your troubles and join us. We're out for a good time."

Some of the speaker's auditors flew



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

38

away after the skylarks, to the annoyance of Mr. Blackbird.

"They have a good influence," said Katie laughing, "because they keep us from taking ourselves too seriously. Sometimes they tease the doves and say to them, 'Just smile and be happy. That's what the world needs. If everyone was happy there wouldn't be any war.'"

"There's a good deal in it, too," I said thoughtfully.

"Yes," agreed Katie, "that's what the whole world is after—Happiness—but people have strange ways of pursuing it sometimes."

"Was that a drop of rain?" I asked suddenly. The sky had clouded and it grew noticeably darker.

"My gracious!" Katie exclaimed in consternation, "I do believe those owls were right. We had better hurry back. Besides it's nearly time for our noon



meal and Mr. Amsherst never will eat a bite unless I am there. He's positively foolish about me, though we've been married quite a while."

So we hastened our steps toward the pheasant house. More drops of rain were falling and I realized with sudden dismay that my hat was not waterproof. Katie scuttled in through the door Mr. Proud had left open for her. "Good bye," she said, "I do hope my husband hasn't been worrying about me."

"Let's not say good bye, but *au revoir*," I amended.

"Oh, yes, indeed," she agreed, cocking her head, "you must come again very soon and we'll have another promenade together."

I would have liked to linger and prolong the farewells, but I saw that Katie was concerned about Mr. Amsherst's state of mind and, as I know



Katie of  
Birdland





Katie of  
Birdland

40

how that is myself, I didn't attempt to detain her, but waived my adieus.

"I must stop, for a moment and apologize to that old owl," I thought to myself, as I hurried along the path, "even though I do get a drenching."

But the owls glared at me uncomprehendingly. The one, who had foretold the shower, had his head perked on one side in a very saucy way as though he was thoroughly enjoying the discomfiture of those who didn't take advantage of his weather prophecy. I tried, in vain to talk to him but couldn't make myself understood. Though he and his mates were muttering, not a sound was intelligible to my ears and I was forced to admit that the magic of the day was over—I no longer understood bird lore. Perhaps the rain dispelled it; perhaps it required the presence of a bird sister. That is a problem I have yet to solve.















